

University of Montana

ScholarWorks at University of Montana

Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, &
Professional Papers

Graduate School

1976

Return to the ice house

Gala FitzGerald

The University of Montana

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd>

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

FitzGerald, Gala, "Return to the ice house" (1976). *Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers*. 3424.

<https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd/3424>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact scholarworks@mso.umt.edu.

R E T U R N T O T H E I C E H O U S E

By

Gala FitzGerald

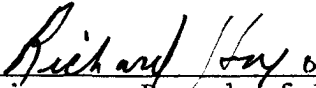
B.A., University of Washington, 1974

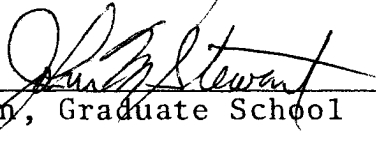
Presented in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

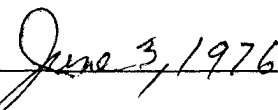
Master of Fine Arts

UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

1976 ©


Chairman, Board of Examiners


Dean, Graduate School


Date

UMI Number: EP35916

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



UMI EP35916

Published by ProQuest LLC (2012). Copyright in the Dissertation held by the Author.

Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

All rights reserved. This work is protected against
unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code



ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 - 1346

6-1-16

317

To the Snow Owl, Mad Meg, and the Green Man

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The poem, "Giving In," was
previously published in
Cutbank 5.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.	iii
BONE GAMES	1
Bone Flight	2
Advice To A Trapper	4
Circling.	5
Toward the Voice.	6
Saying Dream.	7
Father Song	8
Giving In	9
Finders-Keepers	10
Snares and Relics	11
Quinault Bone Game.	12
On Turning Quickly.	13
In the Moon of Making Fat	14
Torso-Sheaf II.	15
Of Your Rising Away	16
THE HANGED MAN	17
Two Medicine.	18
Crossing the Divide	19
Tracking the Dark	20
On the Brink.	21
One Eye Open.	22
The Feral Home.	23
Solving an Old Story Problem.	24
Insomnia.	25
Dark Room	26
Blind Fever	28
Killing a Drawing	29
The Lost Hand	30
Murdering the Stranger.	31
This Covers; This Crosses	32
The Hanged Man.	33

SUN DRIFT, UPDRAFT	35
Return to the Ice House	36
Sun Drift, Updraft	
I. Poet in Fall.	37
II. Buried Below Zero	38
III. Surfacing	40
IV. Double Image.	41
V. A Question of Breaking.	42
Visitation.	45
Beyond Granite Falls.	46

BONE GAMES

BONE FLIGHT

I

Scavenger to lost causes
I sift through the dead,
a soul catcher of small remains
buried under rubble.
In this hunting place--
spines carved by sand.
Among charred stones--
the faint grunts
of squatting men; embers
that flare, sputter to ash.

II

Under dusk bleeding
off into dark,
I whistle over the mouth
of a hollow shell.
Out of the dunes,
two ravens clamor
up from the sage,
circle me in tandem,
then perch on the dark,
waiting. Like two eyes
I cannot look from,
their circles teach me
the turning dance.
We begin again
with the whistle
and rattle of wings.

III

No bird calls from the dark
when the bone dance is done--
but a rustling
of some wounded creature
dragging itself toward cover.
I stalk it into the desert,
holding only a blunt
chip of obsidian
Shadows crisscross. It stops,
turns tail, jaws open--
a man crouched in the brush.

And sudden the stone splinters
into beaks of a night bird
prying apart my hands,
flown at the blackness
his bone face opens.

ADVICE TO A TRAPPER

If the steel jaw snaps shut,
pat it on the head,
wait for the gnashing to stop,
break its back,
and haul the carcass home.

When you wake alone cornered
by loud breathing,
take the leash and collar
from your neck,
and burn them.

The last hand you shake
is made of ice.
On the table
bones begin to shiver.
Say you were just leaving.

You have no next of kin,
but tell of water,
of tattered fur,
and the scratching at the door.

To let it in, shed your fingers.
Prowl the bushes on your belly.

CIRCLING

And this yard too drifts in,
deepens with sleet
in the morning half-light,
as if the town
were soon to be buried.

As if we would wake
with bones in our hands.

Out of sleep I wander
the yard in a Hellgate wind,
my arms littering empty
cartons, scraps and ashes.

At my feet the head
of an elk lies frozen,
its eyes drifted over.
I stare into the blizzard
wondering what else will fall.

There is much trampling,
as though the stump
of spine and fur twisted
all night toward the house.

As if that headless bull
came thrashing with forked
hooves down the dark street,
pawed at sacks of trash
in the alley, in the drifts
blindly searching its head.

But no. It was dogs.
In the moonlight
I hear them circling;
the shadows and grinning jaws.

TOWARD THE VOICE

The man slipping on ice beside me,
in my dream of this valley,
his white hair and beard a moon
over my shoulder moving me down
the mountain where a white voice rises.
And I dreamt the dreamer's voice
saying, You must stop now.

Nights later we were lost
in drifts frozen to the knee;
moon so silvered the ice branches
that light blinded our way.
The old man ahead,
like a voice calling us awake,
pointing to the Dipper
then the snow, kept saying
this was the place
we had been before.

We broke through
the ridgeline
just as I was dreaming
the glare was a full
moon moving under the snow.
The sky drifted, white and fallen,
was no longer; the valley gone.
Only the white remained,
and the distance where we stood
as if floating in space.
And the man was saying,
I dream. Walk this sleep.
Forty books of dreams.
Move toward the voice
in your dream of this valley.

SAYING DREAM

to my father

Like a swamp, the room fogs in.
The family sits rigid on chairs,
ankle deep in reeds and bracken.
Down the walls night spreads
like black oil. Already it is
tomorrow--too late for sleep,
too early to rise without
a bed of dreams behind us.

So we do not move, silent
as if waiting alone, until
you say, "Let's open the gifts.
Let's get on with the giving
and the taking away."
Your voice is weak from the corner;
words behind a churning fog.

We have come here empty-handed--
nothing to tear apart or untie.
This time is your turn.
Your hand made of silver light;
takes a cancelled letter
from a spruce in the swamp.

There's no address. Just your name
written in your own hand.
Father, you hold out
the page inside--blank--
but you read what it says:
 "When I have gone
 into the dark air,
 think of me."

We skip toward you
through the mist, yelling
that there's no giving in;
it's not time yet
to say what's taken away.
You answer, "That is all I can
say," and fade into the fog.

FATHER SONG

Wings rise out of the jagged face
of cliffs, locked to fall
in a leaning glide.
When gulls float overhead,
braced against the wind,
your eyes glint above their beaks.

I search the overgrowth
for traces that will bury
your slack jaw and frown.
Even the sparrows avoid me.
With shrill whistles, they panic
into the highest branches.

Your voice is none of these.
You are nocturnal;
an old floater
through night pines.

I pass away
the time, when sleep
will not take me,
walking the dark.
I am never silent enough
to see you at rest.
Always the twig snaps
too soon, and your hunched form
is a sudden blur of feathers
flown away. I know you
by the waving branch you leave behind.

GIVING IN

Like a last look
a skull full of thorns
in the center of a meadow,
and the scratching of bird claws
covering the sockets with dust,
and the veiled woman
lifting the dark gauze to look:

Death takes the backroads,
the harvesters beside
the glinting arc of sickles,
the shortcuts off cliffs,
and the dreamer who jolts awake
to his fingers drumming
the dank sheets of a bed.

Like moving targets
the dead man down moves on
among us; out of the corner
of our eyes the shadowy motion.
Behind our backs, tapping to get in,
the moths return
to the light of our fires.

The dead give in to the living
by slow degrees, stubborn
to be born again of a dormant shape
born of the breather's hands.
After the grief of a darker night
the mourners give in to living
and the rising bones reply.

FINDERS-KEEPERS

In this poem
you'll notice
that no one is lost
off the southeast cliff,
though keepers keep
beating the underbrush,
calling you, Here beast,
as they trample the ferns.

Crouched under cover,
you say nothing
of your effigy
burning in their brains,
or what happens
when those hands
greasy with heat
corner you on the sheer ledge.

Your falling body,
neither bird nor rock,
is nothing but an eye
floating on fire
that knows the taste of ash
and the blessing asleep in dreams.

No matter how the voices
tempt you out
with a fine carcass
or fresh clot of gristle,
you wake knowing no one is found
where wind and keepers
moan over their vacant cages.

SNARES AND RELICS

You, a habit, a rotating sleeper on a wheel,
who dusts the plastic roses daily,
tend me now like an old mother.
I lift the relic from your neck--
the one with bent wings and limpets.
You know my choices before I do.
Behind the blind squint
and shriveling smirk,
I hear your nails
scrape the windowpane, and you say,
"This is where you see through."
There is hazard in your laugh.

Risk is the raven in your hair
scratching the scalp with a finger
for a claw. Today the path divides,
but my steps go the way of yesterday
in the same sunken prints.
You, a shadow, the straggler left behind,
blacken past me as if late.
Hours after, around the bend,
you sit calmly on a stump
etching two dates and my name
on a stone with a stiff length of twine.

QUINAULT BONE GAME

Above Humptulips, below Quillayute,
between La Push and Leadbetter,
lies the dog.
Beneath the circling raven,
its squint eye hunting
a sallow beast on this paved path;
beneath sentinels perched on cedars
above 109 to the dead end;
between the relayed caw,
and the amber face at the window,
lies the dog.
Lies the lame dog
running in its sleep;
twitch by twitch
chasing his kinsmen
adzed in wood.
Where the bird of thunder flies,
he follows, caught in the talons
that perch on the wolf gnawing
a grizzly that grips the frog.
What the dog devours, splits,
a shaft in its throat
carving down wind to ribcage.
In the belly is the bone game.
Otter claw, knuckle bone;
Hawk beak, and molar.
Fog swallows the bay.
Flood tide circles the ember stone.
The tribal beach posted, closed.

ON TURNING QUICKLY

I wouldn't say it was a ghost
just someone sitting
where I sat over the blank page
before the light went out
who stared back at a woman
who turning to look
couldn't awaken

IN THE MOON OF MAKING FAT

I have floated down
this gorge before,
leaned over
the white water,
and tasted the moist
trickling, over the back-
bone of riverbed.

Here is the sucking stone
in a tangle of ferns.
I have found its pulse
between limbs
buried in lichen,
under deadfalls
and widow-makers.

I come to these rapids
in the Moon of Making
Fat, my hands empty
of rushes, my throat
hungering
to weave the root
with a coiling tongue.

TORSO-SHEAF II

in praise of Hans Arp's
sculpture Torso-Sheaf I

Here in her body the circle begins.
Over the firm curve of buttocks
to where her back twists
toward the luminous
globe of her belly.
Faceless, she seems
to pry open the cramped walls,
and focus behind her
before her on the constant
balance of sun and moon.

And it is here her torso unfolds
as the armless shoulder
arcs down the widening thighs,
and rises to her breasts,
already filling for birth.
Without legs to dance,
she moves obliquely on herself,
a life still in motion
bent to coming toward
her turning past,
her birth to be.

OF YOUR RISING AWAY

That wrinkled sky leans into the mountain,
middle of a moon.
Ringed, night wanders into his eyes.
A green song squats on his tongue.

Make a ring of his ribs in your thighs.
Fragrant as blue metal, nights will fuse
him to your dizzy circles.
No one has the voice to call you back.
Nine windows of moonlit legs trail the sills
behind your eyes. Below the sky
what leaping in still place; what
bone swirls the wind of your rising away.

Desire the last bone on the other side of her.
You, a question of smoke, burn into distance
luminous as hands open, and fold.
Behind the night mountain, white fire ignites.
You, kindling to a cave, even the stones smoulder.

It is the scatters the sky left behind
that green song is singing
in the hour of deeper breath.
Moans will not bury her eyes.
If you uproot her from sleep, save the song,
that gravel in your mouth, for morning.

THE HANGED MAN

TWO MEDICINE

Below Going-To-The-Sun road
we drive down the rib
of a mountain; our hands
like trapped wrens
gesture against glass.

Wind buffets us
as we turn from
its dust and twigs
to a whorl in stone,
the bluff's twisted spine.

Beyond Two Medicine lakes,
aspen, dwarfed by wind,
weave their tines
together, as though
a valley of antlers
were rising from the talus.

Out of their spines, a hunter
leads a skeletal nag,
white as dried bone,
tail blowing between its legs.

CROSSING THE DIVIDE

"From here, all water
runs into one river."

"All these rivers meet
at the gulf."
-John Haines-

Up an ice slope, we slip
against the river flowing
past. Red stones shift
in a bed of green rapids.
We stand aside mutely
looking up to the lunge
of falls raining down.

Cumulus clouds boil over
the cliff in a ridge wind,
as if the sky, too, were falling
off this brink. Beyond,
mountain ash are still,
but here every sprig
shivers in the blast
the passing river shapes.

We are drenched by this wind,
and drink, without bending
down. Going back, we follow
the water's flow, slipping
easily on the steep path.

TRACKING THE DARK

Moon nights I run away
from the laugh and loud
voices, rooms thick with
clinking glasses and
words garbled by one too many.

Out here, they keep under cover.
Dark as slash, the herd
grazes on the edge
of moonshade, rustling the night
crack of hooves in passing.

Months ago, the flicker
of a candle and antlers
told me to come back;
to follow them again
by thickets and dim light.

Out here, there is no panic
only kin feeding
toward dawn, and the strange
huffing sound through their nostrils
that questions what I am.

Past fields shot with quiet,
I wander with them, wanting
fur instead of skin,
prongs of bone from my skull,
so I could also turn tail
when morning opened the door.

ON THE BRINK

to Miro

While you are gone
I will tell you this:
we were born as swimmers
with one face made to dance
against the breakwater
and the drowned,
their hands with the grip
of seaweed pulling us under.

As breath kindled
we felt the raw beginning
sloughed off in blood.
Early as the tightening
clutch of cervix,
a cord twined around
the neck was cut.

If you walk the bridge nearby,
remember this hand drinking
the water gone stale from your glass,
and the lamp still on, have saved you.

If you pause above the water,
hands on the rail, thinking
you have heard your name,
know that I see
your featherless arms
flailing for balance.

And looking back on this lit window,
your face peering from the glass,
think of this hand
tapping the window
waving to make you look.

ONE EYE OPEN

In the back of my mind,
at the back of the house,
a buck hangs bleeding.
I turn the corner
and meet its accusing eye,
still wary of rustling bushes.
I cannot pass to the other side.
A branch rubs under its leg
in the wind between us.

I go around the house,
turning the leaves
where I pass;
turning the corner
to meet its other eye,
closed on the shadow
of my open hand.

Its tongue lolls out, russet
as fall leaves beneath.
But still it is running,
ears alert, flag up,
straining its stiff legs
away from the rope.

I leave it to dream
in the frozen dusk,
where it runs,
one eye open,
into the ground.

THE FERAL HOME

Summer has bought you off,
and the rooms avenge your parting.
Beasts claw at the roof.
They scavenge when a bed turns cold.

I prow1 the rugs, silent as a trapper;
wary of shadows and creaks.
Briers scratch the windowpane--
fingers tracing the braille of my face.

When candles sputter the wind
is holding up the house,
I hear you mumble from a distant room;
hangers shrugging off your clothes.

They are trying to haunt me out.
Or is it the bedlam made of quiet,
jealous lover built of wood,
a heart tired of memory's letters?

I skulk from room to room,
cautious of locks and blinds.
I moan for the keeper, the kept,
and the rescue in your knock.

SOLVING AN OLD STORY PROBLEM

Subtract six years
and add the word no,
divide by two,
the unending unit
split by odd and even.
Take the remainder away.

If May can buy two erasers and
a blank page for ten cents more
than the change in the blind
man's hat amounting to seven
times less than the apples
bought day before yesterday at
twenty cents a pound, how much
will May have left if it
loses itself on the way home?

Subtract six years
and reduce the difference
to a fraction of us,
the divisible word yes.
Multiply what the sum
once was, by the root
of two intertwined
against the dark,
against cancelling
out the answer
with the wrong unknown.

INSOMNIA

It could have been chasm
in the center of the Isle de la Cite,
or a bloated head
in a boat drifting through
fog and swamp grass, away
from my waving hand.
It might have been a blotch
on a leaf, or a birth
nudging down the dark canal.
It could have been trapped,
or floating south.
It could have been in my grip
twisting its prongs to get out.
But it was your eye
inked in where your face was not.

DARK ROOM

to John Haines

You come here often
to develop negatives;
soak to surface
fall leaves frozen
in pools, seasons
numbed by the crack
of drifting glaciers.

No one walks the winters
you have taken. Cold
crouches in the drifts.
Like a stray dog,
wind is the only stranger
going home. You pass
your hand over a blur
in the distance, saying,
this should be done over.

It is night here.
None of the dark
leaks out. Every face
is turned away--
timers, clocks--
their luminous hands
too bright for our blind
shuffling of prints.

In the glare again
you frown over the slightest
fleck in the sky,
a snarl of twigs
in the background
you should have
broken off.

I want to say
you are unkind only to yourself;
light has seeped in
since you focused
that lidless eye
on the stills of where
you were, that
you are here now
scanning the proofs,
not there on the ice lake,
a man stranded
in the melting tundra.

BLIND FEVER

All night burning with fever
I hear the blind river running away.
The clutter of countless voices rushes past--
and beneath this panic
the ancient touch of water and stone.

The sleepless river moves through me.
For a moment I hang onto its cold grip,
then float free in the rippling heat.
I am flooded by voices of strangers.
It is only the watery pulse of a river
moaning my name for help,
and a blind man with a cane
who taps the rotted logs before he falls.

The wandering voices want in.
A snarl of snake eyes dances down the tent.
The lost voices lying awake
call in a blind fever: Voices of stone.

Voices of stone.
Their fallen shadows float face up.
In the ice cloth of this cave
I watch the dark close down,
how stars hover near enough
to melt with a burning hand;
how all night the crimped eye of the moon,
trapped in a spinning pool
lies with voices rising to the surface.

KILLING A DRAWING

Long before the sound of ripping,
a nude washes in
dead center on a tangle
of smudged arms
and legs that trace
the women she was.

Once she wore
what could have been
a curtain, open
on the yawning torso.
Or her back to the window,
she stared at the vanishing
point of geese.
And suddenly she turned
with a blank face
to the knocking.

Now she sprawls
like the driftage
winter storms bring in.
Above the tide line,
sleep piles like snow
on her back. There is
nothing to lie on.
No doors open the distance.
The endless tiles
stutter their black
squares to the edges.

Just before the tearing apart,
she wakes with a dry cough;
wind filling her mouth with leaves.

THE LOST HAND

On the last cast you are reeled in--
a lost hand flopping on shore.
Dusk takes away the green light.
You wither to a flimsy rag
as the moon rides a deepening
wind past the corners of your eyes.

Hands clasped on tomorrow,
the days gone limp with waiting,
she wanders, a lone wing
circling over the pond.

You remember her closing up
as your song rotted the air.
It was easy enough for you
to yawn, doze off as your silence
worked into the quick of a heart.

Now you lie beside her,
and say her face is a change of weather;
that water is made of thirst;
blood, just another name for breathing.

You are the crush of bones
before her body falls awake;
after the panic of slipping,
the hush when falling stops.

By daybreak she is far away
burying your face in the river,
deaf to your voice closed on its echo,
your hand never empty of wind.

MURDERING THE STRANGER

The dead of night no one
heard her scream,
his shadow was the sound
of shuffling in the alley,
a blur darkening to black
in the blue light
across my bedroom blind;
his hand on my sill
as he leaned to wait
for her last guest to leave
and the gutting open
of a kiss goodbye.

And I told myself
it was nothing (the light
turned off to see
better in the dark)
no one at all (the gray mirage
that moved as if a wind were...)
nothing but the constant scuff of gravel
to alarm the pulse and nervous air.

I never knew the woman
from scream to belly
slit with a whittling knife,
raped to the red of blacking out.
That night, ear to the quiet,
I could almost hear her
listening back. She must have
lain awake reciting the bone game;
in the hum of the clock's second hand
someone breaking through the hedge
on a shortcut home.

Did I sleep as the other
opened like a sore,
oozing the thick stuff
we die for in dreams?
Did I dream as she called
from the numb panic
of a darker sleep?
And tomorrow when I wake,
again a stranger,
what's the worth of my alibi
like a tidy ragbag on my back?

THIS COVERS; THIS CROSSES

-two of pentacles-

After shuffling, and the three-divvy cut,
you fall on the center of a cross--
a jester trained to chatter at the sky
and dance the vanishing act.
When you rise again, your antics
are the juggler's trick of up and over.
In each hand you balance a star
floating in a globe of water,
and wonder how they spin
tied that way to a loop of vine.
And when you step away,
they toss on without you,
like sunrise, and the moon
falling down the mountain.

THE HANGED MAN

We begin in circles,
already turned around
to skid out on our faces.
At the first thump,
we hang from a fist,
knowing that breath
is the balancing act
of how to suspend, inverted.

(Perhaps his face will rust,
and ripping out the spikes,
he will come down
off the cross, and say unto us,
"Come on, you guys, this isn't fair.")

We begin by pivoting
on the belly bone;
crawling on all fours
away from the blind
cringe, hugging ourselves
in the bag of waters.
And after, there is no
forgiving the air.

(Perhaps we will number his bones,
plug him up with stuffing,
and propped in the glass case,
his words on tape will say,
"Hell with them.
They know just what they do.")

We go on in silence,
pulled to our feet
by the cross-sticks and strings
over our heads; voices
telling us do this, do that,
and never once listen
to our pulse like a heart
lying belly up in ashes.

(Perhaps he is one of the thieves.
If we bribed him, we could barter
to be saved from the close-out.
Giving him this man's scapular
and that man's relic, he would say
unto us, "Put your hands up.")

We go on in circles,
pacing the thin line
round and round,
without ever meeting
the turned face
opposite us, that passes
where we were and will be,
that knows hanging
is just a jerk of the strings.

SUN DRIFT, UPDRAFT

RETURN TO THE ICE HOUSE

to Chris

You return to the ice house
under granite crags,
wind in your face
when you open the door,
as if it were sighing out
the cold we locked in.
You rove the rooms,
silvered inside with winter:
the pillow frozen
swaybacked where we lay,
the stove dead out,
and my note to buy fuel
next time in Falls.

You will write to me
of the mountain's
crumpled face, throw away
the page, and begin again
about a body
of cold huddled at your back.
Your hand stiffened
in a curve,
you will tell about the avalanche
that almost took the house away,
and I will know
you are safe.

SUN DRIFT, UPDRAFT

I

Poet In Fall

In this season she would fall
with yellow leaves beyond
a face rising from
the blank page under her hand.

Hours she sat staring out,
rooted to the glass pane.
Her face turned to dusk
as leaves darkened
with her scrawled hand.

Behind the closed blind,
nights she heard
the crisp rattle
of crumpled pages
expand, as if strangers
passed in the deepening streets.

From the glass of that
green room, she felt
the pressure of passing
trains, and the part
of her that drifted
away in the Bitterroot
River--a woman
with the limbs
of winter trees
floating on her back
through the ice jams.

II

Buried Below Zero

All night the lamp
burns above the woman
who dreams
too much awake.
Now she dozes
in the rising
hum of silence,
her mouth flat
as the words
she sleeps with.
Voices argue in her
like a crowded room
behind her eyes.

The sharp edges
of their bickering
wake her, and
she drifts back
to the cold husk
of her skin.
A blizzard mutters
under the sill
from what was
a calm terrain.

By then is it light
on the strewn sheets.
Drafts gather in circles.
It is the looking
too long as of searching
for a path home
under snowbanks.
She goes white blind
with breaking day.

Shutters open on
the barred windows.
Outside sky flurries
and drifts in the hedge.
Ice blossoms
on the garden stalks.
There is no end
to the wind inside her,
that dry creaking
behind her tongue.

A ball of feathers squirms
in her hand, and she hears
the warbling of a woman
in song. In the backwash
of echoes, she follows
to the mirror, but the glass
frosts with her breath.

III

Surfacing

In the false dawn she lies
alone, and listens to thumps
of the lovers' bed
against her wall,
and beyond, the Bitterroot River
flooding its banks toward town.

She rises as morning moans
into the next room, as sun
cuts through the blinds.
She rattles the elk jaws
hung by the door,
breathes on them,
and goes out.

Starlings are black tatters
in the larch. They twist
into air like an uprush
of leaves as she passes;
their fallen cries settling.

Through the buds, the briars
unfolding into bloom,
she wanders toward the voices
of boys who call her name.
"Don't let her surface."
They were all young then.
She was knee-deep with them
in the current, beating
the river with a stick.

IV

Double Image

I am the woman
lying in lupine
who watches the man below.
His back bent to earth,
he plucks the shard of blood granite
I held, tastes it, knowing
the rougher edges of my tongue.
This is the distance
spoken through static,
the downwind call
coming back to itself.

Midmorning she mends
the light with splinters of song,
props twigs on the bird graves,
saying, 'He's sleeping.'
From the steep hill
she listens to the runoff,
and watches his figure
hunched over the dust
trying to drink.

In a moment I'll remember
to make his eyes look up,
and then I too will see myself
lying on the blue edge looking down.
I'll lean over the moment
where afterimage is
the meeting of eyes.

So he climbs the mountain
in a clatter of talus,
and lies with her
in the flattened lupine.
Below I cull the gravel
for a chip of the blood bone.

V

A Question of Breaking

1

You do not falter into distance,
like a blind man stumbling into dusk,
but a blur shifting where I stare
past the wreckage of edges.
Miles have collapsed us belly to bone
in a bed of dry rocking. Only
dust lingers on your lost tongue.

Should I lift the blind
with a grin and say,
'This is the static of a bad connection;
months distorted by lying alone,
the trance of being left behind'?
Or should I begin to fade,
a shadowdance at your back,
my skeleton mask turning away
as the door slams shut?

2

Driving through a June blizzard
we take these switchbacks
in silence. The air is a clutch
of nerves as we lean from the pitch
for balance. 'Less wind the better,' you say.
Less than knowing, we poke questions
like stiff twigs down the hole
called a heart, trying to flush
the cowering animal out.

Now you recite your life,
eyes fixed on the dotted line.
No matter how this road straightens
I hear your voice skid
back on itself, swerving
from the head-on
a breakdown might bring.
But this is a bloodless accident
that happened miles back;
the kind that goes out of control--
a quiet sliding out of view.

3

Under us the evening primrose opens.
Night shivers down with the howl
of marauding dogs near the line shack.
But you do not hear them.
You are trying to
convince yourself with my body.
In a moment we will lie still
alone, your hand stroking
the grit of this desert.

VISITATION

For weeks we have leaned
against the wind.
Bent by the blustering,
we burrow deeper
behind our hands,
taming back what tugs from us.

In the dark we wake to what we own
blowing from the sheds.
Mornings
we count the missing.
By nightfall
we must lipread over the breathing.

It has gone on so long
our words are drafts
seeping through
chinks in the walls.
Gestures limp as newsprint
fly up from our sides
and float off, forgotten.

We have given up
the outside.
These rooms fog
with swirling dirt.
Sky circles overhead.
By habit we tilt
in chairs and listen
to branches on the roof,
and the dull thuds
in the yard--
birds capsizing from trees.

BEYOND GRANITE FALLS

To thaw out the dank
and rancid taste of mildew
from these rooms
will take our lives.
Into late dusk we go on
hacking out the snags
and deadfalls; sledging
the stubborn hunks
full of water
that roll away like heads
as our blades spark in the dirt.

It must be the curled skeletons
of rats that plug the stovepipes.
Smoke backs up the house.
We are like phantoms
drifting the ice rooms,
kindling in our arms.

Flicker after flame goes out.
We keep stoking.
The drowned limbs don't light.
We shave them down
to steam in the grate.
Walls begin to drip.

Now for no reason
the fires catch at once;
as if I have stolen
to the backroom shed,
pried off slabs
of shiplap and shakes
to stop the smouldering.

You hold your hands
over the heat,
and do not hear
my distant ripping
out of the walls.
Better with no ears
for the breaking--
you won't know
until thaw:
what we were
burning down
was the house.